

The future and changing economies of rural areas

**Project Report D18 of RURBAN,
Minutes meeting study areas**

Dan Koivulaakso

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University of Helsinki

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Foreword: the RURBAN-project and the context of this report

The research project Building New Relationships in Rural Areas under Urban Pressure (RURBAN) analyses the relationships between rural and urban actors in order to assess their role in enhancing the diversity of rural landscapes. Since agriculture and forestry are the most important land uses in European rural areas, the project pays attention to their role in safeguarding the green landscape and in providing RGS. The most important RGS within this context are first and second houses, tourism and gastronomy with agri-food marketing.

The research project RURBAN is a 3-year-project (2002-2005). The project is a partnership between the Agricultural Economics Research Institute in the Netherlands (coordinator), the University of Helsinki, the University of Paris, the Hungarian Academy of Sciences and the University of Valencia. The research project has been funded by the European Commission within the Fifth Framework Programme (QLK5-CT-2002-01696). The Ministry of Agriculture, Nature and Food quality in the Netherlands funded 50 percent of the budget for the Agricultural Economics Research Institute.

Research objectives

1. *The green rural landscape in a rural-urban context*, in particular: perception of urban pressure, rural-urban relations, RGS and compensation payments;
2. *Demand for RGS*, in particular: identification of trends and motives to demand RGS and willingness to pay for RGS and the green landscape;
3. *Identification of strategies by intermediate actors*, in particular: to organise RGS and compensation payments to enhance RGS;
4. *Propensity to provide RGS*, in particular: identification of trends and motives to supply RGS and to preserve the green landscape;
5. *New relationships between rural and urban areas*, in particular compensation payments and RGS to preserve the green landscape.

To be able to identify differences and similarities the RURBAN project analyses experiences in Finland, France, Hungary, the Netherlands and Spain. In each country two study areas have been selected. The first is the Metropolitan area (M-area): a rural area nearby a metropolitan area. The second is the Tourist area (T-area): a rural area nearby tourist coastal zones. Relevant for the first type of areas is that they border to (or includes) a 'metropolis'. Relevant for the second type of areas that they include a substantial level of tourist accommodation, in particular second houses. In both areas there should be a policy to care for the green landscape, indicated by zoning plans, creation of landscape parks or other measures.

Overview participating countries and study areas (see <http://www.rural-urban.org>):

Country	Metropolitan study area	Tourist study area
Finland	Helsinki area (Uusimaa)	Åboland (Varsinais-Suomi)
France	French Vexin (Ile de France)	Pays de Caux (Seine-Maritime)
Hungary	Western Budapest area	Balaton & Valley of Arts (Veszprem)
The Netherlands	Oost Zuid-Holland	Zeeuwse eilanden
Spain	Camp de Turia (Valencia)	Marina Alta (Alicante)

One important dimension in the RURBAN research project is to further interaction between actors in rural and urban settings and between researchers and relevant actors “in the field”. In order achieve these objectives the research team has participated in meetings, seminars and round table discussions in both the T -and the M - areas. In Finland the study areas are the Helsinki Region (M-area) and Åboland (T-area). The empirical material upon which this report is based (Report D18 in the research plan) was gathered during this type of a meeting held in Helsinki, at the Swedish School of Social Science / University of Helsinki, on November 23rd 2004. A large group of interviewees both from the T- and M-regions had been invited and the meeting was open to the public and integrated into the yearly ‘Swedish School of Social Science Open House Day’. Approximately 100 - 120 people took part in the event. The seminar got an extra importance from the fact that the Finnish Minister of Environment, Jan-Erik Enestam, had the opportunity to take part in the seminar; both with a plenary speech and with participation in the following round table discussion. It could also be mentioned that a follow-up discussion (with Kjell Andersson and Erland Eklund from the research team) was later broadcasted on Finnish National Radio.

This D18 report has been written by BSS Dan Koivulaakso, who worked as a trainee with tasks related to the RURBAN –project from June to August 2005. Since Koivulaakso had not previously been engaged in the project, he took more a role of a reporter with the objective to explain important themes in the RURBAN project to the public. In this report he has concentrated on questions regarding new (official and semi-official) administration, environmental issues and regional and local development. As main data he has used the summary of the panel discussion (the above round table discussion), Minister Enestam’s speech, a presentation of the RURBAN project by the research team and an article by Senior Researcher Kjell Andersson, published prior to the seminar in Universitas Helsingiensis. All of the material has been translated to English by Dan Koivulaakso. The research team wants to thank Dan Koivulaakso for his valuable contribution to the RURBAN project.

Erland Eklund

Senior Lecturer, in charge of the Finnish RURBAN project

1. Introduction

On November 23rd 2004 a panel discussion on the future and changing economies of rural areas was held at the Swedish School of Social Science, University of Helsinki. The seminar was open to the public and a part of the research project *Building New Relationships in Rural Areas under Urban Pressure* (RURBAN¹). A number of interviewees from earlier stages of research had been invited for the discussion and for the dissemination of research results. Participants in the panel discussion which was called: “*Providing Meaningful Life instead of Just maintaining Life – Visions and Realism in the Debate around New Rural Areas*” [“Från livsmedel till livsmening – visioner och realism i debatten om den nya landsbygden”] included:

- *Erland Eklund*, Senior Lecturer at the Swedish School of Social Science, Senior Researcher in charge of the RURBAN-project.
- *Jan-Erik Enestam*, Minister of the Environment and former Chairman of the board for the Archipelago Delegation
- *Paula Wilson*, T-region entrepreneur for the last seven years. Lives in Rosala which has a population of ca 150.
- *Monica Aaltonen*, T-region entrepreneur from Aspö, in the outer archipelago.
- *Leena Tuokko*, Planning Engineer of Kirkkonummi municipality in the M-region
- *Janne Wikström*, Student Adviser and a sporting & outdoor enthusiast who has formerly worked as a producer of nature experiences.

The discussion was chaired by Senior Lecturer Erland Eklund, who gave a presentation on the RURBAN-project and its results after Minister Enestam first introduced the future coastal policies. The event was a great success and had around 120 attending guests. A piece on the seminar was later broadcasted on Finnish National Radio (YLE Vega).

This article is based on the views and commentaries expressed in the discussion, Mr. Eklund’s presentation, Minister Enestam’s introduction and an article by Senior Researcher Kjell Andersson whose areas of expertise include the Finnish archipelago and rural development in the late-modern epoch. The references are all from the above sources². For Enestam it is always mentioned whether a quote is from his speech or from the round table discussion.

¹ More information on web pages: www.rural-urban.org and <http://sockom.helsinki.fi/forum/RURBAN.html>.

² All translations made by the author of this report

1.1 Key Questions

All of the four sources (discussion introduction, presentation and article) discuss two main questions from slightly different points of view. The questions are:

- Does urban pressure present an opportunity or a threat?
- How is the economy built up and what does it consist of in contemporary rural areas?

What is actually being discussed around the first question, is, how has the relationship between the city and countryside changed? And how it will change? There are several trends to be observed in this volatile relationship. Kjell Andersson points out some of the largest structural changes in his article “Why we believe (and want to believe) in the idyllic archipelago” [*Därför tror vi (och vill vi tro) på skärgårdsidyllen*]:

During 1950-1975 the southwest archipelago (Åland and Åboland) lost more than half of its population. The downscaling within the traditional occupations of farming and fishing was even greater. Since the 1970s the population has been relatively stable, but the economic structures have changed. More and more people acquire their income from different services and increasingly from tourism and leisure related work. The archipelago looks the same on the outside, but it needs to be remembered that it to large extent is a carefully upheld façade.

(Andersson, 2004)

With the term façade, Andersson means that even though the archipelago has changed quite a bit, its prospects as a tourist and leisure landscape depends on images of former glory, the idyllic, and nowadays nostalgic, archipelago where “Cottages are red, cows graze on the pasture, the fishing boat gives a traditional engine sound when it strives for the bay in the morning and the farmer drives an old model tractor etc.” (Andersson, 2004).

As for the second issue the emphasis is on the Rural Goods and Services (RGS) supply of municipalities and independent producers and that of consumer demand. Paula Wilson puts it like this:

I believe it is correct to say that there in Åboland is a regional economic system that evolves around tourism. It is probably the most important source of income in the future. Since we don't have cows anymore we have to “milk the tourists”. Something that is important to remember is that when we work day and night for a half a year we get to enjoy a very good level of services year round. Because of the high number of visitors in the summer we can maintain a lot of services during the whole year.

(Wilson in panel discussion, 23.11.2004)

What is important to identify in the above passage, is that tourism and the supply of and demand for Rural Goods and Services that follow from it, are important for the livelihoods of people as well as ways of maintaining lively local communities. That is to say if it was not for the demand and money spent by tourists and leisure dwellers the persons who provide the services for them would not be able to have services year round and thus live in the archipelago. From this can be assumed that the suppliers and the ones with demands for RGS are highly dependent on each other also in wider scale than just that of exchanging money for services. The private providers of services are also somewhat dependent on public financing through different projects such as the leader project. The importance in helping aspiring entrepreneurs is well described by what Monica Aaltonen stated:

I have been involved in a small “Leader project” called *At the Archipelago Inhabitant’s Place*. The project that was launched as a protest action against the big investments (18,000,000 FIM) a project called “*Tastes From the Archipelago*” (Skärgårdssmak) acquired, later received 500,000 marks (84,000 €) itself. This money was used to help 10 entrepreneurs in starting their businesses. Nine out of ten still are still entrepreneurs. Our goal in the protest was to provide exactly as good quality of services as the larger competitor and offer the goods and services at our own houses.

(Aaltonen in panel discussion, 23.11.2004)

A question lying behind the second question is how opportunities for payments of private RGS are valued? This problem mainly evolves around the differences between private and public RGS, and how they interact. More specifically for example taxes and development money for specific areas are of interest here, as are general planning and regional visions. The quotation of Monica Aaltonen above also gives an idea of this. Money from structural funds is sometimes being used to support communities instead of making large public investments. In other scenarios such as in the electrification of the archipelago, more direct governmental control takes place.

In the following chapters I will present what has been discussed around the above key questions regarding the future and changing economies of rural areas. Before I do so I will include a brief summary of the first part of Erland Eklund’s presentation on the RURBAN-project and its results. The latter parts of his presentation are included in the other chapters.

2. What is a “new rural landscape”?

“Residence, agriculture, recreation, environmental protection etc. are all enclosed in practically the same areas, ran by their separate logics and often administered by separate quarters”

(Andersson, 2004)

It is problematic to make sharp divisions of areas. The old rural landscape is an area of production, but nowadays few people are needed in the cultivation of food. The old countryside is the equivalent of agriculture both geographically and culturally. There have been intensive debates between researchers over the meaning of new rural landscapes within the last 10-15 years, said Eklund, and then went on:

RURBAN is one of many primarily national projects in researching the future of European rural landscapes. Europe’s position in the global markets is an interesting factor; agriculture is defended on the basis of conserving the location of it, the rural landscape.

(Eklund, 2004)

According to EU the rural landscapes are to be multifunctional areas for a multitude of people, groups and interests: “providing meaningful life instead of just maintaining life” as the name of the seminar was called. Eklund explained these new areas in the following way:

These areas are the new rural landscape. The term can be thought of as the rural landscape having new roles besides agricultural production. Rural areas can be spaces of consumption, leisure, recreational activities or dwelling for people with otherwise urban lifestyles. Professor of rural studies Hannu Katajamäki from University of Vaasa has called the rural landscape a variegated mosaic of functions.

This change of view is in many ways based on EU-discussions which have led to conclusion along the line of: Agricultural policies must be supplemented with rural politics. The rural landscapes must lean on the second pillar i.e. the economic field of everything else than the agriculture. Building this second pillar has been the goal of the multifunctional rural landscape since the 1990s.

(Eklund, 2004)

LEADER-projects and grassroots-thinking are important aspects of “second pillar politics” in new rural politics said Eklund. These projects which are designed to support rural areas have two approaches or lines of thought to them:

Quality production:

Short links between production and consumption, ecological cultivation, new energy sources, upkeep of the environment, rural tourism etc.

Close ties with traditional agriculture, ideas of diversification are strongly present, products are matched the demand. Smaller amounts, shorter transports and high unit prizes are key factors.

The expanding leisure and tourist market:

Rural and coastal areas are seen as landscapes of consumption and growth areas for the leisure industry. The advancement of the new businesses is seen as completely separate from the agricultural sector.

(Eklund, 2004)

2.1 Late modern nomadism

There has been a strong increase in commuting to work and leisure activities. People have bonds to two places of living and thus multiple identities relating to space said Eklund. This creates a demand for Rural Goods and Services (RGS) as new groups of people are demanding different things of rural areas.

The new rural landscapes cannot be understood without analyzing the relationship of urban and rural. Transformations are not taking place in firsthand in rural areas. Just like the old rural landscape was dependent on the town-dwellers to consume their agricultural products, the new rural areas are dependent on consumers who have one foot in the city and the other one in rural areas. To be able to understand city culture and changes in trends and styles is a key issue for entrepreneurs in the new rural economy.

The notion of late modern nomadism wants to point out that mobility, travel and commuting between places are central elements of modern life. The new rural landscape is strongly dependant on these traits of late modern living.

(Eklund, 2004)

In Scandinavia there is a strong tradition of having country-houses on the side of city apartments. This is something that is not easily understood in central Europe, nevertheless it is something to be pointed out in the discussion of new rural landscape in Finland.

It is not only summer guests who have interests in rural or coastal areas and nature. Also a great number of short term visitors such as representatives from different companies who visit for recreational purposes or by nature lovers for whom the rural areas offer relaxing

leisure activities have demands and expectations on rural areas. The relationship between rural and urban population is thus an important factor in the development of rural areas.

2.2 Results from M- and T-regions in the RURBAN-project

The project data has been collected by interviewing a total of 120 key players in the two regions. The interviewees were made up of administrators, entrepreneurs and staff or volunteers from organisations in both the M- and T-regions. They were asked for example following questions:

How does land-use politics and landscape planning work in the M- respectively T-region?

How do “urban consumers” feel about the rural areas, what are their demands for products and services?

How do “new rural suppliers” see their future and the new rural economy, how can they meet the urban demand?

Most of the research results will be included later in the text, but here are some general commentaries Eklund gave when he gave his presentation:

The rural areas are affected differently in M- and T-regions. The M-regions are under heavy pressure to expand built areas. Construction of housing is the driving force of development. The T-regions feel the pressure from tourists and leisure time interest groups. Here the advancement is based on the new rural economy. More results and summaries are included in the chapter (4) about RGS.

(Eklund, 2004)

3. Does urban pressure present an opportunity or a threat?

The tourists and leisure time spenders that Andersson talks about are primarily city dwellers. This makes it evident that there is urban pressure present in the countryside. As we will see in this rapport there are many different views on what the effects of this pressure are. The interest of cities and municipalities for green hinterlands can be seen linked to this. Green areas can help keep leisure time spenders in the own municipality or on the other hand bring in tourists.

3.1 Key issues and own experiences

I will begin with a quote of what Minister Enestam stated in the round table discussion:

I don't believe that there is a trend of increased friction between dwellers and people who spend their leisure time. I think that a positive relationship based on mutual dependency would describe the relationship more adequately. If there was no stable dwelling in the countryside, the leisure time spender would not have all the services available to them. The dwellers keep up the archipelago paradise and the visitors bring income which provides for year round services for the locals. There would not be many stores open if it wasn't for the people who like to spend their leisure time out in the open.

(Enestam in panel discussion, 23.11.2004)

Although Enestam expresses this highly optimistic vision of the relationship between dwellers and leisure time spenders he is also very aware of the challenges caused by mobility, change and separate interests between groups. He uses the expression "sometimes there are more hefty debates on issues". Examples Enestam puts on the table include debates around whether or not to build wind power plants in the archipelago. These kinds of discussions have been held in Houtskär, Högsåra, Dragsfjärd and Korpo (T-region). The issue has also been discussed in Ingå where the Barösund region is making land reservations for wind power plants. Besides wind power Enestam also points out that fish farms are potential reasons for hefty debates. Since there are challenges caused by the separate interests of the groups discussed here, Enestam said: "Both dwellers and the leisure class should be represented and be able to discuss the different angles of the issue". By this he wanted to say that interest groups which mobilize effectively and might have surprising effects based on the logic of numbers should not be given too much influence in the matter. "The Archipelago Delegations proposition to found smaller units for cooperation and discussing these themes in advance would be a very important measure in avoiding conflict." Enestam continued. Based on this we can clearly see that the question of threat or possibility is not an easy one.

There are many ways to ease the pressure of urbanization in the countryside. The two most potent ones are most likely municipal landscape planning and the protection of green hinterlands. Lena Tuokko of Kirkkonummi (M-region) who is an expert on this stated following during the debate:

As a planner I see more threats than possibilities in growth. There are about 30,000 inhabitants (in Kirkkonummi). This year the growth rate is more than three percent, and that seems to be too much for us. Two percent would be ideal in order for the building of services to be able to keep up with the number of inhabitants. It is kind of hard to control these flows of movement though, this year more than 150 building permits have been given to rural areas (of Kirkkonummi). If you count an average of three to four people per family that means that several hundred new inhabitants will move there. Our general plan and partial general plan for the coast and archipelago, states that large nature areas and valuable nature areas should not be built on. The parts of the Noux national park that are on our land, the Lappträsk area, some forest and farm land and the archipelago are safe from construction. With the general plan, quite large areas of Kirkkonummi's nature and environment can be preserved. Other areas are quite hard to keep natural. We have formulas for calculating how much can be constructed on sparsely built areas. Some plots of land have already been built as much on as the plan allows. Yet, it is hard to restrict building with general plans. Why we want to do it in the first place is to ensure that existing townships, and their services such as schools, transports etc. stand on a healthy base.

The biggest threat for the municipality is the increased traffic, and that the space between housing, that is sometimes called the ecologic corridor, grows thinner and thinner. We have tried to restrict building on farmland, but it is not strictly forbidden. The fast growth rate also is also a source of conflict. Services in the municipality have not been able to keep up with the amount of people and everybody is not happy about that. It is between those who pursue traditional livelihoods and the new inhabitants of Kirkkonummi that conflicts erupt. A few years ago there was a struggle about a greenhouse that filled EU-standards but which annoyed some neighbours because of the amount light it shed to the surroundings. Then there are the horse stables golf courses. There are no restrictions on building golf courses on forest or arable land. Also sewer systems need to be developed to the more rural areas as well since more people are moving in all the time, and this is very expensive for Kirkkonummi. Some of the newcomer's demands of lit up pavement roads for light traffic then again seem just about absurd when looking at municipal budget. It is going to take 30 years to be able to build something like that.

(Tuokko in panel discussion, 23.11.2004)

What Tuokko said makes sense in many different ways. There does not seem to be an easy solution to the problem of urban threat. The municipalities need workforce and new

inhabitants to take care of the growing sectors of elderly care etc. but at the same time they cannot offer the services needed, for example by young families. To generate income outdoor areas are allowed to be constructed fairly freely as can be seen in Tuokko's commentary on horse stables and golf courses. That again is a cause of conflict between their users and groups of people who would rather have other services made available to them. When talked about on the level of municipality planning, the issues of urban threat, which can be a relatively minor factor in very sparsely populated areas turns into something that the whole municipal economy is entangled in. And if that is the case it is important to look at the structures of the urban threat.

3.2 Larger structures and theory

All that has happened in Kirkkonummi is not in any way unusual. Kjell Anderson writes about the archipelago, but Kirkkonummi and the M-region looked at above have plenty of similarities with it. Andersson puts it like this:

What has happened in the archipelago is not in any way unique, it's happened on many sparsely populated areas. Belgian sociologist Marc Mormont believes that the traditional division between city and countryside has been tilted over by development. Many people today are so mobile that it is hard to distinguish whether they are rural, urban or archipelagic – many commute to and from work others commute to the cottage on the weekends. This mobility combined with the mobility of goods and information means that places no longer are autonomous in the way they used to be. They are parts of regional, national and global networks. Rural areas are today “multifunctional”; dwelling, agriculture, recreation and environmental protection are all taking place in basically the same places, according to their own logic and administered from different bureaus. On top of that the rural areas are also a projection of different identities and symbolic longings: Swedish speaking Finns are said to long for pine trees, environmental activists idolize the old natural forests, “Fox-girls” choose fur farms as symbolic objects in their struggle for what they believe to be animal rights, families with small children search for security and so on. At the same time the relation between rural and urban has changed all over Europe. We need the idyllic countryside to be unchanged.

(Andersson, 2004)

If looked upon like this, it is not only a matter of services and practicalities but also of ideology and choices of lifestyles. The scale at which the development of municipalities is widened to concern all sorts of areas and the relationship between rural and urban becomes even more complex. If there is no traditional division left as Marc Mormont proposes, how should possible conflicts then be dealt with? Are traditional rural areas to stay rural with the help of planning and preserving or is the intertwining of the two just something to be accepted? Both questions find a possible answer in Andersson's quote from above: “The

archipelago looks the same on the outside, but it needs to be remembered that it to large extent is a carefully upheld façade”. The rural is kept rural in people’s minds but has developed and become more modern since the old times it represents. The urban threat and the processes it brings along are in many ways imminent for rural areas if they are to survive. At the same time former glorious non-urbanized times are being upheld by some. Issues of fish farming and that of wind power are still potential sources for conflict in the archipelago. Locals are in support of wind power and leisure dwellers/tourists see it as one of the biggest threat towards the landscape and the environment. Nevertheless Andersson believes in the archipelago:

Putting all the worries and questions aside the Finnish archipelago still represents a “future landscape”. Tourism and leisure consumption are the central aspect of the post-modern economy of symbols and experiences. Theorists such as Englishman John Urry for long represented a view that the “tourist gaze” meant longing “elsewhere” and away from weekly routine. In his revised second edition of *The Tourist Gaze* (2002) Urry makes a u-turn, and states that we more and more look at everything even weekdays through tourist’s eyes. We become tourists of life and the staged and the real world blend together – just as French post-modernists have foreshadowed decades ago.

(Andersson, 2004)

3.3 Administration and the future

Since it is believed that the Finnish archipelago is a future landscape, plans for a sustainable future need to be presented. During his speech Minister Enestam brought up a number of important factors that need to be dealt with in order for the future to be a bright one.

When there is a strong pressure to grow in areas on the coast, efforts are needed to prevent and control ever more intensive floods and storms. This is important in order to maintain the diversity of nature, the cultural heritage of coastal areas and traditional livelihoods. A more regional but at the same time more comprehensive strategic approach is needed. New coastal policies are needed for human actions to be reconciled with processes in nature.

(Enestam, 2004)

A number of the new policies Enestam refer to are EU related. He introduced to the audience a “Strategy for integrated coastal administration on coastal areas” which is based on 2002 recommendation by the European Parliament and the Council of Ministers. The recommendation states that existing sector administrations are not sufficient and some times not even adequate for preserving coastal areas.

The ecosystem method is included in a multitude of programs and strategies which are being worked out at the moment. One of these is the “Strategy for integrated coastal administration on coastal areas” which is based on a 2002 recommendation to EU: member states from the European parliament and the council of ministers. The recommendation states that existing sector administrations are not sufficient and some times not even adequate for preserving coastal areas. Enestam said that both strategic and coordinated actions are needed:

According to the recommendation each member state is to investigate which the most important actors in the coastal regions, this including small local actors as well as international agents, the administration and the legislation by which it governs. Based on this inquiry, assessments on how well the coast can be preserved as functional areas in this time of rapid change and different demands should be made. Are different sectors of the administration coordinated well enough or do they counteract each other? Is there enough capacity to react on sudden situations such as floods or accidents? Are local characteristics taken enough into account in decision making, and are the decisions made on a long-term?

The inquiry mentioned in the recommendations is currently being carried out in Finland. Results acquired will lay the ground for a strategy on use and management of the coastal areas. It is planned to report to the EU Commission how the strategy will be carried out early on in 2006. This means that making the strategy will be done in 2005. It will be worked out by the Ministry of the Environment and a work group made up of members from a broad spectre of fields. Meetings for different interest groups will also be carried out in the coastal regions.

(Enestam, 2004)

Enestam then continued by bringing up another issue of interest; the European landscape convention. He said that “It points out the meaning of different landscapes to people and the importance of a purposeful long term development of landscapes. Denmark and Norway have ratified the convention whereas Finland and Sweden have signed but not yet ratified.” (Enestam, 2004).

According to the convention states have to develop their programs, plans and procedures on landscapes, and integrate landscapes into national, regional, and municipal programs on land usage. “Coastal landscapes are one of the priorities at the Ministry of the environment” Minister Enestam said.

All these plans bring a lot of hope into rural areas and strengthen their opportunities for the future. The need for the plans again show that there are significant threats, many relating to larger scale urbanization or urban people visiting, that need to be dealt with now and in the future. What exactly these new opportunities are, the logic of their economies and how they are valued is the next theme I will look into.

4. How are RGS (rural goods and services) valued?

How the present rural landscape looks or future rural landscape will look like very much depend on the economy. Rural Goods and Services (RGS) as all other systems of economic interaction have two different sides to it. These are the supply of RGS and the demand for RGS. Both the supply and demand can be divided into the private and public sector. I will first write about economic possibilities and RGS in general and then include results and views on the future from the RURBAN-research, and do it separately for the M- and T-regions.

4.1 Introduction to new rural economies

Kjell Andersson brings up an interesting overview of post modern or modern economies depending on the view of society in general; in the following I will include a long passage with him theorizing around the new rural economies:

Actually the stubborn view of an old countryside is a prerequisite for the development of new rural areas. The traditional economy which is built on goods and services is shifting into an economy of exciting experiences and symbolism in which the growth and possibilities are dependant on brands, lifestyles, individualism etc. To draw a clearer picture: Asia is today for a large part an area of traditional economy, Paris lives on selling its atmosphere and reputation while a region in the archipelago hopefully can capitalize on its culture and traditions as in Skärgårdssmak. The potential of rural areas and the archipelago in an economy of experiences and symbolism lies in the tradition, culture and the (post)modern consumers demand for them. The global economy has in many ways undermined the conditions for traditional economies, in the same way as the urban sprawl satisfies the demand for urban experiences and symbols. And exactly because of that we believe in idyllic countryside and archipelago even though we realize it being an illusion.

(Andersson, 2004)

4.2 Leisure living

The Finnish archipelago is in fact a forerunner for new rural areas. Already in the 1950s regular white- and blue-collar workers started acquiring land and building cottages in the archipelago. At first houses where small and modest, just as spare time was scarce. This lay the ground for the “multi-locality” which Mormont and others consider to be a prominent trait of contemporary Europe.

(Andersson, 2004)

Since that time residences have improved a great deal and started to remind normal residences more. The time spent at them has steadily increased to include weekends and for any also for longer periods of time outside of the summer vacation. “Areas where cottages were and situated logically encouraged the leisure time residents to this in hope of increased income from taxation and public services such as roads. The discussion on this has kind of died out after taxes on second homes were ordained in 1993” said Andersson. And continued: “visions of partial municipal registration which would judicially support the multi-locality mentioned above have been proposed, but they have been deemed too radical”.

The spare time inhabitants in the archipelago and countryside are informal in the way that their local contacts are more directed at the civil society and the market than at the administration and public sector. This doesn't make them less important, most local stores are strongly dependent on leisure class. Also the social life in the peripheries of the archipelago is strongly connected around them. Leisure time spending multi-locals act as link between the archipelagic dwellers and the outside world. As an example of this is that there are countless of influential Swedish speaking Finns who have their summer residences in the archipelago. The total impact that the leisure time spenders have on the archipelagic economy is big, but expected to grow bigger when pensioners will have more spare time or even move out there.

(Andersson, 2004)

In his article Andersson writes further on tourism, and separates it from second homes. I will not present this further here, since the actual tourists are users of some of the same RGS:s relevant to this paper. In the next chapter I will present some views on tourism and second homes for the T-region.

4.3 A scenario for future development in the T-region

With more developed second housing, and also an increase in the amount of leisure time, people are in theory capable to spend more time at their country cabin. These better built houses are often more durable than before and thus bring a continuity in the visits to the area in question.

The durability has led to more demand for tourist attraction, in other words created a demand for new entrepreneurs, services (for example cultural) and niche products. With these new RGSs available also short term tourists travelling by can create a demand for the economy. Eklund presented following views on the tourism professional who is here also an entrepreneur. There are three main business categories to concentrate on:

- Visitors, such as individuals and families or group tours made up of companies, pensioners, school classes etc. who want experience specific settings or activities made up of nature, boats, fishing, sports, arts or other things.
- Service for people who visit long term, but still are tourist more or less, and need excitement from time to time. For example summer festivals could be ideal for they also attract short term visitors at the same time
- Niche (utterly segmented) products can be anything from fresh agricultural products, gastronomic treats, handicraft or carpentry.

To sum things up, the key problems or risks according to Eklund are:

- Reactions like: We don't want *that* in *our* village
- Alliances of groups which desire no change what so ever in the structure of the region. They think the old way is better and are often afraid that changes will be too overwhelming, and that all privacy and the peacefulness of the sea and archipelagos will be lost. These aspects of change have not traditionally had such a large impact in Finland which is homogenous culturally and has had small class differences.

The discussion around these subjects in many ways supported what has been stated above, Paula Wilson stated:

Tourism is probably the most important source of income in the future. Since we don't have cows anymore we have to "milk the tourists". Something that is important to remember is that when we work day and night for a half a year we get to enjoy a very good level of services year round. Because of the high number of visitors in the summer we can maintain a lot of services during the whole year.

(Wilson in panel discussion, 23.11.2004)

She also said that the tourism helps the archipelagians in keeping up their own culture. By this she meant that they put on a show for tourists, and thus keep up their old traditions and the heritage of the archipelago. She continued with talking about the differences between urban and rural and said:

It sometimes feels annoying when urban people who have sacrificed the nature for the city come and tell us that everything should be like 50 years ago. We cannot give up our sources of income just so that city dwellers can come out for nostalgic trips to the country once a summer. Some people think we should offer them the very same things they have given up in order to have a high standard of living. According to some people there should be only fishermen and sheep-farmers in the archipelago, some have gone as far as to make trouble for fish farms. But anyway we'll get by all that.

(Wilson in panel discussion, 23.11.2004)

Monica Aaltonen continued with a warning. According to her the small islands need to be careful since the big islands, Nagu, Korppoo, Houtskär, Iniö and maybe for some part Rosala, which have ferry routes can develop more advanced tourism. On those islands experiences of nature can be combined with luxury. There can be luxury hotels and big fast boats cruising around. She also stated the following:

Personally I would like to preserve the outer archipelago of small islands. Pro Åboland Archipelago is an organization which defends the outer islands and wants to preserve them as the cultural artefacts they have become. Because of these measures the small scale tourism is very important for us. It is also important that we keep the decision making local so that nobody from above orders what kind of tourist measures should be taken. That is something to be agreed with neighbours and family on the individual islands.

(Aaltonen in panel discussion, 23.11.2004)

According to Aaltonen the Leader-financing has been very important as well as the electrification of the outer archipelago. All islands with year round inhabitants now have electricity. “But still we also have something that the larger islands cannot offer. I tend to say that our resources are the star sky, silence, the roar of the sea and genuine nature” she said. An interesting way of staging the archipelago that Andersson has written about is what Aaltonen said about their cow leasing:

We lend cows from a farmer on Korpo. He brings them out here in April, and let’s them graze freely in the meadows. The farmer built fences around the village instead of the cows, so that they have a lot of space in the nature. I think the countryside culture is in our genes because people over 50 become abundantly happy when they see cows grazing about freely next to where they are having dinner. But also youth, who have never seen cows grazing, become astonished when they see them. It is very important to take care of the small scale places.

(Aaltonen in panel discussion, 23.11.2004)

At the end of the discussion the audience was give a chance to talk, one of the quests asked the following question: Do producers of agricultural products feel pressured to meet standards for locally produced environmentally high quality goods?

Mrs. Wilson answered the question by saying that she thinks that people who live in rural areas are environmentalist, but that it doesn’t mean that they have to live like they did in the 1930s. “It should be respected that people in rural areas keep a more than 1000 years old landscape vital. We don’t need to be patronized by city dwellers, we understand the importance of a clean nature ourselves” she said.

Minister Enestam commented further:

It is a fact that the demand for locally produced agricultural goods has increased strongly. The “Skärgårdssmak”, although it is a small project, reaches all the way from Stockholm to Åland and Åboland. In it we have a very good example of how production should be dealt with. Agricultural goods are very pure in Finland, and local food will have a strong demand, especially with the growth of industrialized farms. Prizes for these products can also become more reasonable if the supply of them goes up a bit.

(Enestam in panel discussion, 23.11.2004)

To wrap things up, it could be said that RGS are vital parts of the economy for certain small areas in the archipelago, despite the fact that RGS might not always show up on the economic measurement systems available (auditing, production figures etc.)

4.4 A scenario for future development in the M-region

I will here first present a summary of Eklund’s presentation on RURBAN-results, and then return to the panel discussion to bring up some views presented by M-region experts.

Municipalities surrounding urban areas are increasing very rapidly. Acceptable commuting distances are on the increase, most of Uusimaa is within accepted distance for work in Helsinki. Rural idyllic spaces appeal strongly to people, even the most urban youth tends to be interested in rural areas when raising a family, taking a dog or breeding horses comes to talk. Suddenly also the old family becomes interesting. In these family values rural municipalities see their opportunities.

“In municipalities neighbouring to the urban sprawl a 50 percent rule is taking shape. About half of the new houses are built on unplanned land and the other half on land that is included in detailed planning” Eklund said in his presentation. This means that not only central areas of communities are expanding, but the townships on the peripheries as well.

A relatively large number of movers may also change the language profile of the communities. Finland is a bi-lingual country, and many of the neighbouring municipalities have had a larger Swedish speaking population than the urban area they surround. This of course will build pressures on services in the areas in question said Eklund, and went on:

Growing urban demand for recreational spaces other than natural and forest areas is a source of juxtaposition. Green undeveloped areas stand in the way of progress and construction for some interest groups. This is a large challenge for the land planning authorities and structures. One idea to solve the puzzle has been a “green circle” project which idea is to merge the largest forest areas (Sibbo Storskog, Noux National Park and

the “West forest of Kirkkonummi”) with the help of “green corridors”.

(Eklund, 2004)

As a whole, the new rural economies are minor factors in the total economy of municipalities neighbouring the urban. Nevertheless, their image of youthfulness and adventurousness are a great benefit for the communities in marketing themselves. In the M-region the new economic ventures are usually based on short term stays. Prime examples of this include golf courses, the new economy of built around horses, winter sports centres and marketing of local farm products on site. Other sources of income based on short term visits are “farms” with domesticated animals, catering companies whose catch is the old fashioned countryside atmosphere and rural restaurants based on the same idea. Gastronomic experiences have turned out to be an important source for tourist income at large, and a question of image as well. Up until recently visitors from abroad have not been involved in the nearby M-region rural tourist attractions to any noticeable extent. The current planning of a visitors centre in the Noux national park is hoped to bring a change into this.

Eklund: summed up his presentation like this: “the key problems or risks are:

- The division between recreational built areas and natural areas.
- New language structures due to relatively large amounts net migration
- Urban disinterest in nearby new rural economic ventures”

Returning to the subject of the Noux national park, one of the themes discussed was whether or not it is possible to combine the idea of an outdoors area for city dwellers with that of large scale tourism in Noux? Do international tourists have to go all the way to Kainuu to see wilderness or can it be seen in Espoo, less than 20 km from downtown Helsinki?

Janne Wikström from Kirkkonummi who has worked with producing nature experiences commented like this:

Migration, construction and planning play a huge part in making the area tourist friendly; they are extremely important actors, but also the inhabitants play a big role. If you look at the issue from a M-region and T-region point of view, Noux could be seen as a M-region for inhabitants of Helsinki, and as a T-region for tourists from abroad. It is easier and cheaper for global corporations to invite guests to the proximity of Helsinki than to northern Finland.

Another key issue is that of collective transportation. In order for that to be successive a “gate-theory” is being worked out. This means that the entrance for tourists and the destination for the transports should be at a main gate to Noux. Also other gates for people coming in from

neighbouring municipalities such as Helsinki, Espoo, Vantaa, Kirkkonummi, Vihti and Nurmijärvi are being planned as well as small entrances for people walking in from townships nearby. What needs to be done is to find a balance between these three forms of entrance and between tourism. The rapidly growing ecologic tourism and protecting the environment are also things to be considered when building new services in the area. Environmentalism is even more important with a lot of people moving in close to the natural park as Leena (Tuokko) mentioned.

(Wikström in panel discussion, 23.11.2004)

5. Future

The countryside or the rural areas seem to be much more diversified than ever before. Rural development will lie in local and regional clusters which try to advance themselves. Both Uusimaa and Åboland seem to have good prospects (as M- and T-regions) for the future. As of the future of the welfare state in rural areas, it is very important for the administration to stay put and observe the ongoing changes in order to be able to secure everybody's special needs. "Possibilities to be looked into are how to take advantage of being one of EU:s western neighbours with Russia and how this possibly can affect the short term travel. Also how the niche production of agricultural products can be carried out with the EU emphasising large agricultural units is an important factor" Eklund said. And at the same time the most important factors are naturally a clean and healthy environment that Enestam talked about, and the level of services that Tuokko talked about.

Further, all this naturally needs to be seen in the light of (communication) technology as well. How can new technologies be used for the benefit of rural areas for example in marketing or in helping people not give up their other life while still spending rural quality time. Or is that just economic utopia? That is something that the next few years will show.

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